

# Autumn and the youth

## High-tech marketing aims for new generation of foliage fans

By Nicole C. Wong

GLOBE STAFF

**O**ld-fashioned fall foliage tourism has taken a high-tech twist to appeal to a lucrative and largely untapped market: Folks under age 50.

This year for the first time, leaf peepers can sign up for New Hampshire's weekly text-message alerts and reroute their day trips on the fly, ensuring they'll drive through a corridor of crisp crimson leaves. Or they may seek out the "trees glowing with vibrant colors" and the "orchards overflowing with ripe fruit ready for picking" that the state tourism department's podcast gushes about — if they're not instead lured to Vermont in hopes of winning an iPod by plucking one of the dozen wooden apples hidden throughout that state's orchards.

These tech-charged marketing campaigns are part of the New England states' battle to attract more of the wanderers and their wallets during one of their most robust three-week tourism stretches of the year. They are attempting to recast their rustic image and leaf-peeping's reputation as a retiree activity in hopes of capturing millions of additional tourism dollars a year and cultivating the next generation of foliage fans who will be loyal visitors for years to come.

It may be a tough sell. Young adults like Adrian Williamson, an 18-year-old Tufts University freshman and native of South Portland, Maine, are reluctant to fritter away a tank of gas and a sleep-in Saturday on dying leaves.

"All I remember about leaves is it means traffic," Williamson said. "I would not go on an excursion to see the leaves. I have trees in my backyard, and I see them change."

But tourism officials insist the uphill

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battle is worth it. "With the aging population, it's pretty clear that you absolutely have to continue to be relevant to the younger generation," said Alice DeSouza, director of New Hampshire's Division of Travel and Tourism

Development. And the text-messaging option, which tourists can sign up for at [visitnh.gov](http://visitnh.gov), helps New Hampshire look hip. "We're the first state in the nation to have this," boasted marketing manager Lori Harnois.

Solid data on how many visitors and how much revenue fall foliage pulls in each year is hard to come by since car-bound day trippers can't easily be counted and foliage viewing is often intertwined with other activities, such as visiting the kids in college or attending professional conventions. But overall, New Hampshire and Vermont estimate visitors made 10.9 million trips in September, October, and November 2005 while spending about \$1.4 billion. That makes fall the second most crowded season for New Hampshire, after summer, and the third for Vermont, trailing summer and winter.

But most of these visitors are, well, old. Vermont commissioned a study in 2002 and discovered that the average visitor who consistently travels to the state every autumn to see the leaves is 53.

That's not necessarily bad news in the short term. As the country's baby boomers age and find more time and money on their hands, foliage tourism could very well enjoy an uptick. But after that population swell passes, leaf-peeping and its related revenue could dwindle.

That's part of the reason several states are tweaking their marketing efforts.

"Drawing the younger generation now is going to get them to continue visiting Vermont again, come different seasons, and eventually bring their own children to our state," said Steve Cook, deputy commissioner for Vermont's

Department of Tourism and Marketing.

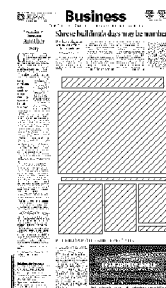
Vermont's apple-orchard iPod treasure hunt may turn 11-year-old Brandon Fiege of Hopewell Junction, N.Y., into a lifelong leaf-peeper. He won an iPod Nano last weekend when his family paired a fruit-picking excursion the kids wanted with a scenic foliage drive the parents were interested in. The family usually visits Vermont only during the summers since "we actually have fall foliage in New York," said his mother, Stephanie Fiege, 39. But the trip was fun, she said, so "we'll go back next year."

The Fieges are the type of tourists Vermont is trying to attract. The state-sponsored report revealed that 91.7 percent of Vermont visitors who view fall foliage annually hail from New England and Mid-Atlantic states, while 65.7 percent of the state's tourists who ignore the leaves also live in those regions. "These statistics reinforce the notion that foliage tourism is dependent on tourists within a drive region," the report states, and suggest "there is an untapped fall foliage market within a day's drive of Vermont."

To be sure, fall foliage season hasn't completely embraced technology. Tourism officials have yet to see anything along the likes of, say, a Segway leaf-peeping tour.

But now a few of the states' websites showcase interactive maps that try to predict where the foliage will peak and when. These are modern-day versions of the old dial-an-update foliage forecast hotlines (which, by the way, are still available).

Those may come in particularly handy this year. It's always hard catching the leaves at the right moment since the changing



hues depend on a confluence of factors, including rainfall, temperature, sunlight, and soil conditions. But this year, some regions received less August rainfall than usual, followed by unseasonably warm September weather and a delayed first frost.

As a result, forest officials say Massachusetts leaves started flaming out a week earlier than usual while Vermont's hillsides are trading their colors more slowly. In many places, the leaves look healthier, which should result in vivid and vast colorful displays with branches full of leaves — eventually.

"I'm looking out the window right now and I'm seeing some trees turning a little yellow, but most look green," said Paul Schaberg, a plant physiologist with the US Forest Service in Burlington, Vt., yesterday. "It almost looks like summer."

Ironically, the unpredictable season has rendered all the new tech tools rather useless — and even a bit irksome — to one group

of tourists: those who journeyed from afar and booked their travel arrangements long in advance.

Juan and Celia Ibarra, of Frisco, Texas, paid for their airfare and hotel rooms in mid-August, a month before boarding one of the first Greyline fall-foliage bus tours that wind through central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire for eight hours. The couple, age 68, checked New Hampshire's online foliage forecast map every few days before flying to New England. They realized they would arrive before the whoosh of majestically changing leaves would.

"It's kind of disappointing," Juan Ibarra said, stepping off the motor coach and surveying almost nothing but greenery. "But it's OK. We'll come back next year."

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## GOT COLOR?

Find the best places to view the fall leaves at [boston.com/travel](http://boston.com/travel).



ELLEN HARASIMOWICZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Ron Williams of LaVerre, Calif., photographs his wife, Cindy, at Brookdale Fruit Farm in Jaffrey, N.H.**

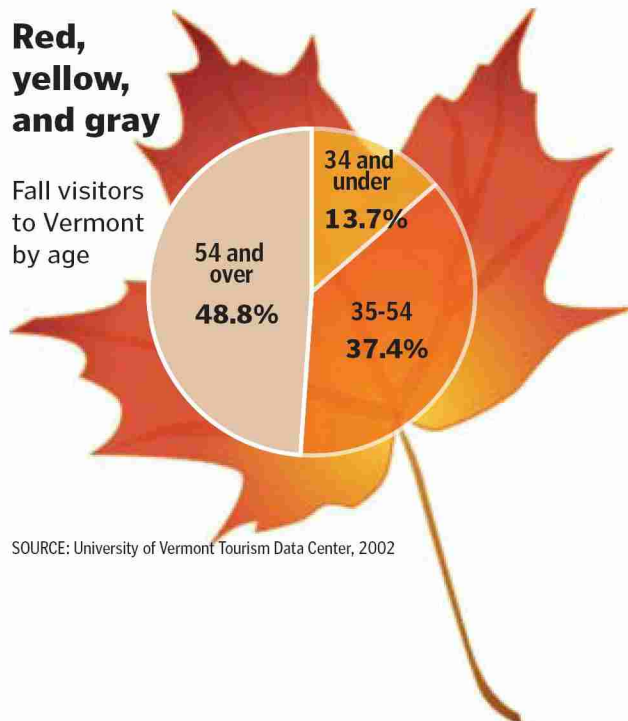


ELLEN HARASIMOWICZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Paula McGuigan Stuart and her husband, Glenn Stuart, of Manchester, England, take in the mostly green foliage in Rindge, N.H.

## Red, yellow, and gray

Fall visitors  
to Vermont  
by age



SOURCE: University of Vermont Tourism Data Center, 2002